

ASSEMBLYWOMEN



CHARACTERS

PRAXAGORA, an Athenian wife
FIRST WOMAN, a friend of Praxagora
SECOND WOMAN, Praxagora's neighbor
BLEPYROS, Praxagora's elderly husband
NEIGHBOR, Second Woman's husband
CHREMES, an elderly acquaintance of Blepyros
SELFISH MAN
HERALDESS, a woman appointed by Praxagora
THREE OLD WOMEN
GIRL
EPIGENES, a young man in love with Girl
MAID of Praxagora
CHORUS of Athenian wives

Mute Characters

SICON and PARMENON, slaves of Neighbor
YOUNG WOMEN, accompanying Blepyros

PROLOGUE

SCENE: A street in Athens, just before daybreak. A young figure wearing a woman's white, beardless mask³⁸ enters from one of three doors in the scene-building carrying a lighted lamp, wearing men's clothing and carrying a walking-stick,³⁹ and addresses the lamp in a woman's voice.

PRAXAGORA:⁴⁰

O radiant disk of my ceramic lamp,
 fairest invention of skilled artisans,
 I shall reveal your pedigree and fortunes fair.
 For, whirled on the wheel by the potter's impetus,
 you hold the Sun's radiant honors in your nozzles.

Now send forth the fiery signal as arranged. [*She swings the lamp to and fro.*]
 You alone we've made privy to our plot, and rightly, since you also stand
 by us in our bedrooms as we execute Aphrodite's maneuvers, and when
 our bodies are flexed, no one banishes from the room your supervisory
 eye. You alone shine your light into the hushed-up recesses between our
 thighs, when you singe away the hair that sprouts there;⁴¹ and you stand
 by us when we stealthily open the pantry, stocked with bread and the
 liquor of Bakchos. And you never babble to the neighbors about the things
 you've abetted. So you'll be in on our present plans too, the plans my
 friends and I agreed on at the Skira.⁴² But the women who are supposed to
 meet here haven't shown up, though it's almost light, and the Assembly
 is about to begin! We "wenchmen" must grab our seats, as Phylomachus
 once put it, if you still remember⁴³—and settle ourselves without
 attracting notice. [*She paces around.*] What can be keeping them? Don't they
 have the false beards they were told to get? Was it hard for them to steal
 their husbands' clothes without getting caught? [*Figures wearing women's
 underclothing and carrying lamps, men's clothing and false beards enter the orchestra
 through a parodos, followed by several other figures, similarly dressed.*] But I see a lamp
 over there, coming this way. I'll duck out of the way in case it happens to
 be a man.

[*She retreats to a doorway; one of the entering women goes onstage, while others gather in the orchestra.*]

CHORUS-LEADER [*to her companions*]: Time to move! Just now, as we were on
 our way here, the Herald crowed a second time!

PRAXAGORA [*in a loud whisper, which spins the new arrivals around*]: And I was up the
 whole night waiting for you! Well, I'm going to get this neighbor of mine
 out of the house—by scratching softly at her door, since her husband mustn't
 notice. [*She scratches on the door.*]

FIRST WOMAN [emerging from the door, dressed in men's clothing]: I was just getting dressed when I heard you give the secret knock: see, I wasn't asleep! You know, my dear, the husband I live with is from Salamis:⁴⁴ all night long he was sailing me all over the bed, so I just now got the chance to grab his suit. 35

[First Woman takes from her house-door three chairs and a lectern, which she and Praxagora set up on stage; meanwhile several other women enter the orchestra.]

PRAXAGORA: Hey, I see Kleinarete and Sostrate coming, and there's Philainete.⁴⁵

CHORUS-LEADER [to the new arrivals]: Get a move on! Glyke has promised on oath that the last woman here will be fined ten quarts of wine and a bag of chickpeas! 40

PRAXAGORA: Look, there's Smikythion's wife Melistiche trying to run in her old man's boots! And I think she's the only one who had no trouble getting away from her husband!⁴⁶

FIRST WOMAN: And there's the barkeep's wife Geusistrate⁴⁷—see her, with the torch in her hand? 45

PRAXAGORA: And there's Philodoretos' wife, and Chairetades', and a lot more women besides: anyone who's anybody in town!

SECOND WOMAN [to Praxagora]: I had an awful time, my dear, making my escape and getting over here quietly. My husband stuffed himself with anchovies at dinner last night and was up all night coughing! 50

PRAXAGORA: Well, now that you're all here, please sit down. [The women except Praxagora sit in the chairs.] I want to ask you if you've done everything we agreed on at the Skira.

FIRST WOMAN: I have! First, I've let my armpits grow bushier than underbrush, just as we agreed; then, whenever my husband goes off to the agora, I oil myself and spend the whole day in the sun trying to get a tan. 55

SECOND WOMAN: Me too! I threw my razor out of the house so I'd get all hairy and not look female at all!

PRAXAGORA: Have you all got your beards—the ones you were told to bring with you when next we met? 60

[The women onstage produce false beards.]

FIRST WOMAN: Sure, by Hekate!⁴⁸ I've got this nice one here!

SECOND WOMAN: And mine's far nicer than Epikrates'!

PRAXAGORA [to the Chorus]: And how about the rest of you?

FIRST WOMAN: They've got them; look, they're nodding yes.

PRAXAGORA: All right, I see you've taken care of the preliminaries: and you've got your men's boots and walking-sticks and suits, just as we stipulated. 65

FIRST WOMAN: [*producing a huge shillelagh*]: Look, I've brought Lamios' shillelagh; I took it while he was asleep!

SECOND WOMAN: Must be the shillelagh he uses to fart!

PRAXAGORA: By Zeus the Savior, if he wore Argos' goat-leather jacket he'd be perfectly suited to provide fodder for the public—executioner!⁴⁹ But let's get on with the next items of business, while the stars are still in the sky. The Assembly we're prepared to attend begins at dawn. 70

FIRST WOMAN: By Zeus, we've got to leave time to get seats right under the Chairman's dais. 75

SECOND WOMAN: [*taking a knitting-basket out of her bundle*]: I brought this along, just for something to do while the men are filing into Assembly.

PRAXAGORA: While the men are filing in, stupid?

SECOND WOMAN: Sure, by Artemis!⁵⁰ I can hear just as well when I'm knitting. My kids have nothing to wear!⁵¹ 80

PRAXAGORA: Listen to you! Knitting? You mustn't risk showing any part of your body to the men. Wouldn't we be in fine shape, if the assemblymen are all there and then some woman has to climb over them, hitching up her clothes, and flashes her, her—Phormisios?⁵² If we're the first to get to our seats, no one will notice that we're keeping our clothes wrapped tight. And when we unfurl the beards that we're going to stick on our chins, who would suspect that we're not men? Take Agyrrhios: now that he's wearing Pronomos' beard he passes for a man; and yet this very man used to be a woman! And now, you see, he's the most powerful figure in the polis.⁵³ And it's because of him, I swear by this dawning day, that we must dare such a daring deed, hopeful of somehow being able to take over the government and do something good for the polis! As it is, our polis is oarless and becalmed. 85 90

FIRST WOMAN: But how can a congregation of women, with women's minds, expect to address the people? 95

PRAXAGORA: Much better than anybody, that's how! They say that the young men who've been reamed the most are also the most effective orators! And as luck would have it, that's exactly what nature suits us for!

FIRST WOMAN: I'm not so sure: inexperience is a dangerous thing.

PRAXAGORA: Well, isn't that why we've gathered *here*, to practice what we're going to say *there*? Come on, attach your beard; [*to the other women*] and that goes for everyone else who's been practicing how to gab. 100

FIRST WOMAN: Is there anyone here, friend, who doesn't know how to *gab*?

PRAXAGORA: All right then, you put on your beard and become a man; I'll set out these garlands and put on my beard too, just in case I decide to make a comment. 105

[*The women attach their beards.*]

SECOND WOMAN: Face this way, darling Praxagora. My dear, what a ridiculous sight this is!

PRAXAGORA: Ridiculous?

SECOND WOMAN: Looks like somebody bearded a grilled squid! 110

PRAXAGORA: [*moving behind the lectern and speaking in the voice of a Herald*]: Purifier, please make your rounds with the sacrificial cat.⁵⁴ Assemblymen, come forward into the sanctified area. Ariphrades, stop chattering!⁵⁵ You there, come forward and take a seat! Who wishes to address the Assembly?

SECOND WOMAN: I do! 115

PRAXAGORA [*indicating the pile of garlands*]: Then put on the garland and may your speech be propitious.

SECOND WOMAN [*putting on the garland*]: Ready.

PRAXAGORA: You may speak.

SECOND WOMAN: Don't I get a drink first? 120

PRAXAGORA: Drink?

SECOND WOMAN: Well, sir, what did I put on a garland for, then?⁵⁶

PRAXAGORA: Get off of there! You would have done the same thing to us in the real Assembly!

SECOND WOMAN [*flaring*]: What? Don't they drink in the real Assembly? 125

PRAXAGORA: Listen to you—"don't they drink"!

SECOND WOMAN: Sure, by Artemis, and they drink it *straight*! Their decrees, when you think about the reasoning behind them, are like the ravings of drunkards! By god, and they pour libations too: why else would they make

those long prayers, if they didn't have wine? And they yell at each other like drunks, and the police drag away the guy who's had too much. 130

PRAXAGORA: Well, you may get back to your seat and sit down! You're worthless!

FIRST WOMAN [*returning to her seat*]: By Zeus, I would have been better off without this beard—I'm absolutely parched with thirst! 135

PRAXAGORA [*to the seated women*]: Is there another candidate orator among us?

FIRST WOMAN [*rising*]: Me!

PRAXAGORA [*motioning her forward and extending another garland*]: Put this on then. We can't stop now, after all our planning. Now, carry on like a man and speak cogently; lean hard on your stick like this [*she adopts an oratorical posture*]. 140

FIRST WOMAN: I would have preferred to yield the floor to one of the usual speakers, sitting quietly and listening to a very good speech. But as far as my own vote goes, I say in barrooms we outlaw the use of kegs to hold water! It is a bad policy, by the Twain Goddesses.⁵⁷

PRAXAGORA: By the Twain Goddesses, you bungler? Where is your mind? 145

FIRST WOMAN: What's the matter? I didn't ask for a drink!

PRAXAGORA: God no, but you did swear by the Twain when you're supposed to be a man! [*Dejectedly*] And the rest was so good, too.

FIRST WOMAN: Oh! [*Resuming a manly voice*] By Apollo . . .

PRAXAGORA: No, stop. [*She plucks the garland from Second Woman's head.*] I won't take another step on the road to being an assemblywoman until everything's exactly right. 150

FIRST WOMAN: [*snatching back the garland*]: Give me the garland. I want to try my speech again; I think I've got it down nicely now. [*She assumes the rhetorical posture.*] In my view, ladies of the Assembly . . . 155

PRAXAGORA: Again, you loser? You're calling men ladies!

FIRST WOMAN: [*pointing to the audience*]: It's that Epigonos over there:⁵⁸ I caught sight of him and thought I was addressing women!

PRAXAGORA [*pointing her away from the lectern*]: Shoo. You go back to your seat over there too. [*To the seated women*] To judge from what I've seen of your abilities it seems best that I put on this garland and make the speech myself.⁵⁹ [*Taking the lectern*] I beseech the gods to grant success to today's deliberations. 160

My own stake in this country is equal to your own, and I am annoyed and depressed at all the polis' conduct of affairs. For I see her constantly employing scoundrels as her leaders. If one of them turns virtuous for one day, he makes up for it by being wicked for ten. You turn to another one, and he causes even worse trouble. I realize how difficult it is to talk sense to men as cantankerous as you, who fear those who want to befriend you and consistently court those who do not. There was a time when we convened no assemblies at all, but at least we knew Agyrrios for a scoundrel. Nowadays we do convene them, and the people who attend and draw pay for it praise him to the skies, while those who cannot attend say that the people who attend for the money deserve the death penalty.⁶⁰

FIRST WOMAN: Well said, by Aphrodite!⁶¹

PRAXAGORA: Pitiful! You swore by Aphrodite! Wouldn't it be charming if you spoke that way in the Assembly?

FIRST WOMAN: But I wouldn't have!

PRAXAGORA: Well, don't get into the habit now. [*Resuming her speech*] And about this alliance: when we were examining the issue, the people insisted that the polis would perish if we did not ratify it. But when it finally was ratified, the people were unhappy, and the alliance's staunchest supporter had to leave town in a hurry.⁶² When it's a question of launching a fleet, the poor are all for it,⁶³ while the rich and the farmers are against it. First you are angry with the Corinthians, and they with you; then they're nice people, so you have to be nice as well. The Argives are morons, but Hieronymos is a sage. And occasionally we get a fleeting glimpse of salvation, but Thrasyboulos gets angry that you're not begging him to lead you.⁶⁴

FIRST WOMAN: This man's intelligent!

PRAXAGORA: That's the way to applaud! [*Resuming her speech*] And you, the sovereign people, are responsible for this mess! For while you're drawing your civic pay from public funds, each of you is figuring how you can personally profit. Meanwhile the state staggers around like Aisimos. But listen to my advice and you shall escape from your muddle. I propose that we turn over governance of the polis to the women, since they are so competent as stewards and treasurers in our households.

ALL THE WOMEN: Hear hear! Well said! Pray continue, sir!

PRAXAGORA: And their character is superior to ours, as I will demonstrate. First of all, they dye their wool in hot water according to their ancient custom, each and every one of them. You'll never see them trying anything

new. Contrast the Athenian polis: never content to do well with a tried and true method, they are always fiddling around with some pointless novelty. Meanwhile the women settle down to their cooking, as they always have. They carry burdens on their heads, as they always have. They celebrate the Thesmophoria, as they always have. They bake cookies, as they always have. They drive their husbands nuts, as they always have. They hide their lovers in the house, as they always have. They buy themselves little extras, as they always have. They like their wine neat, as they always have. They like to get fucked, as they always have. And so, gentlemen, let us hand over governance of the polis to the women, and let's not beat around the bush about it or ask what they plan to accomplish. Let's simply let them govern. You need consider only two points: first, as mothers they'll want to protect the soldiers; and second, who could be quicker at sending rations to soldiers than the mothers who bore them? No one is more inventive at getting funds than a woman. Nor would a woman ruler ever get cheated, since women themselves are past masters at cheating. I'll pass over the other arguments. Adopt my resolution and you'll lead happy lives.⁶⁵

SECOND WOMAN: Well said, dearest Praxagora! What skill! What skill! Where did you learn such fine talk, my dear?

PRAXAGORA: I lived with my husband on the Pnyx,⁶⁶ with the refugees,⁶⁷ and learned by listening to the orators.

FIRST WOMAN: Then it's no wonder, madam, that you were so impressive and sage. What's more, your fellow women hereby elect you general if you succeed in this plan of yours. But what if Kephalos⁶⁸ challenges you abusively? How do you plan to handle him in the Assembly?

PRAXAGORA: I'll say he's crazy.

FIRST WOMAN: But everyone knows that!

PRAXAGORA: Well, I'll say he's a dangerous psychopath.

FIRST WOMAN: Everyone knows that too!

PRAXAGORA: Then I'll say that a man who does such a bad job making pottery is sure to do a terrific job running the polis.

FIRST WOMAN: But what if Neokleides the squinter abuses you?

PRAXAGORA: I'll tell him to go squint up a dog's butt.

FIRST WOMAN: And what if they try to screw you?⁶⁹

PRAXAGORA: I'll screw them right back: I know a good many tricks myself.

FIRST WOMAN: There's another danger we haven't discussed: if the police jump you, what will you do then? 235

PRAXAGORA [*assuming a wrestler's stance*]: I'll be ready for them like this—they'll never get on top of me!

FIRST WOMAN: And if they do hoist you, the rest of us will—ask them to put you down! 240

SECOND WOMAN: I think this is a fine plan we've thought up. But one thing we haven't given much thought to is how we'll remind ourselves to put up our hands when voting; we're used to putting up our legs.⁷⁰

PRAXAGORA: That's a tough one. [*Demonstrating*] Just remember that you vote by undraping your right arm and raising that hand. Go ahead, now, hitch up your tunics. [*The women do so. To the chorus*] Now hurry up and put on your boots, just the way your husbands used to when they went off to the Assembly or on some errand. Then when you're all dressed up, fasten your beards. And when you've attached them exactly right, put on the men's coats that you stole and drape them correctly. Now lean on those walking-sticks as you walk, and sing like old men, country-style. 245
250

CHORUS [*fully disguised*]: Great instructions!

PRAXAGORA: Let's go forward just so, because I expect some women from the country are on their way directly to the Pnyx. Well, hurry then, since the drill on the Pnyx is: in by dawn or go back home with nary a clothespin.⁷¹ 255

[*Praxagora, the First and Second Woman depart; the women in the orchestra, now disguised as men, form up a chorus.*]

PARODOS

CHORUS-LEADER: Gentlemen, it's time for us to march—and “gentlemen” is the word we must remember to use, and never let it slip from our minds. We run no small risk if we're caught dressed up for so dark a deed of daring.

CHORUS (*strophe*):

So it's off to the Assembly, gentlemen!
The magistrate has sounded his warning:
if anyone fails to come bright and early,
covered with dust, happy
with a breakfast of garlic soup

with a spicy look in his eye,
 he'll not get his three-obol pay. 265
 Hey Charitimides,
 Smikythos and Drakes,⁷²
 get a move on! Watch your step,
 don't strike a false note
 in the role you've got to play. 270
 When we've got our tickets
 let's be sure to sit down together
 and raise our hands in favor
 of whatever our ladies propose.
 What am I saying? *Gentlemen* 275
 is the word I ought to have used!

[Half of the chorus exits.]

(antistrophe)

Let's make sure to jostle
 the assemblymen from town,
 who never used to attend:
 when the pay was only one obol, 280
 they sat around gossiping
 in the garland-shops,
 but now they fight for seats.
 Never in the good old days,
 with noble Myronides in command, 285
 would anyone have dared
 to husband the polis' affairs
 for a fistful of money.
 No, everyone would come to assembly
 with a little bag lunch: 290
 something to drink, dry bread,
 a couple of onions and three olives.
 Now what they want is three obols
 for doing a public service,
 like common laborers. 295

[The rest of the chorus exits.]

EPISODE

[Through the door by which Praxagora had entered now enters an old man, dressed in women's shoes and a skimpy yellow shift.⁷³]

BLEPYROS⁷⁴ [to himself]: What's going on? Where has my wife got to? It's getting near dawn and she's nowhere to be seen. I've been lying awake for ages, needing to shit, trying to find my boots and coat in the dark.⁷⁵ I've groped everywhere but couldn't find them, and all the while the dung man kept pounding at my back door, so finally I grabbed my wife's slip here and put on her Persian slippers.⁷⁶ [*Looking around and advancing into the orchestra*] Now where, where could a man find an out-of-the-way place to take a shit? Well, anywhere is fine at night. At this hour no one's going to see me shitting. God, what a fool I was—getting married at my age! I deserve a good flogging! You can be sure she didn't go out on any decent errand. Anyway, I've got to do my business. [*He squats down and begins to grunt loudly; another old man, holding a lamp, appears at the Second Woman's window.*]

NEIGHBOR: Who's that? Surely not my neighbor Blepyros? Yes, by Zeus, the very same! Say, what's this yellow all over you? Kinesias hit you with his droppings?⁷⁷

BLEPYROS: Say what? No, I had to come out here and I put on my wife's little yellow shift.

NEIGHBOR: Where's your coat?

BLEPYROS: Can't say. I looked for it all over the bedroom and couldn't find it.

NEIGHBOR: Well, why didn't you get your wife to tell you where it is?

BLEPYROS: By Zeus I couldn't: she doesn't happen to be in; she slipped out of the house on me. And I'm worried she's up to no good.

NEIGHBOR: Poseidon! Exactly the same thing just happened to me: the woman of my house has gone off with my clothes! That wouldn't be so annoying, but she's taken my boots too! I couldn't lay my hands on them anywhere.

BLEPYROS: Dionysos! I couldn't find my Spartan boots either! But as luck would have it I had to shit, so I threw on these pumps and dashed out. Didn't want to shit on the comforter; just had it cleaned.

NEIGHBOR: What can she be doing? Did one of her lady friends invite her out for breakfast?

BLEPYROS: That's probably it. She's not a tramp—as far as I know.

NEIGHBOR: You must be pooping a ship's cable! Me, I've got to be getting along to the Assembly, that is, if I can get hold of my coat—it's the only one I've got!

BLEPYROS: Me too, as soon as I finish my business. At the moment some kind of choke-pear has got my food blockaded.

NEIGHBOR [*disappearing from the window*]: Like the blockade Thrasyboulos proposed against the Spartans?

BLEPYROS [*laughing*]: Dionysos, yes! It's got me pretty uptight anyway. [*To himself*] What am I going to do? This present predicament isn't my only anxiety: what's going to happen when I eat something? Where will the poop go? As it is, he's got me bolted up tight, this fellow from Cul-de-Sac. [*Surveying the audience*] Is there a doctor in the house, with the right treatment? Any of you asshole-experts knowledgeable about my condition? I know: Amynon! But maybe he'll refuse. Somebody call Antisthenes right away! As far as grunts and groans go, he's the man to figure out the meaning of an asshole that needs to shit.⁷⁸ O Mistress Hileithya,⁷⁹ don't let me down when I'm bursting and bolted! I don't like the role of comic potty!

[*Enter Chremes.*]

CHREMES [*catching sight of Blepyros*]: Hey there, what are you doing? Not taking a shit, are you?

BLEPYROS [*hurriedly straightening up*]: Who, me? No indeed, not any longer anyway, by god. I'm on my feet again!

CHREMES: Is that your wife's slip you're wearing?

BLEPYROS: Yes, it was dark in the house when I grabbed it, by mistake. But tell me, where have you been?

CHREMES: At assembly.

BLEPYROS: You mean it's adjourned already?

CHREMES: By god it has, and before daylight too! And the ruddle-rope got a big laugh too, by Zeus Most Dear, when they swung it around!⁸⁰

BLEPYROS: You got your three obols anyway?

CHREMES: I wish I had! But this time I was too late. God, I'm ashamed to admit <that I left empty-handed.

BLEPYROS: So you got nothing?>

CHREMES: Nope, absolutely nothing but my shopping bag.

BLEPYROS: But what made you late?

CHREMES: A huge crowd of people showed up en masse at the Pnyx, an all-time record! In fact we thought they all looked like shoemakers.⁸¹ Really, the assembly was awfully pale-faced to behold. So I didn't get my pay, and a bunch of others didn't either.

BLEPYROS: So, I wouldn't get paid if I went there now? 365

CHREMES: Hah! Not even if you'd gotten there before the cock finished crowing!

BLEPYROS [*tragically*]: Ah, what a blow! Antilochos, raise not the dirge for those three obols but rather for me who yet live: for all I had is gone.⁸² But what business could have fetched such a mob together so early? 370

CHREMES: It could only be that the chairmen decided to schedule deliberation about the salvation of the polis. And right away Neokleides the squinter⁸³ groped his way to the podium to speak first, but the people started to yell as loud as you please, "Isn't it awful that this guy dares to address us, on the subject of our salvation no less, when he can't even save his own eyelids?" 375 And he squints around and yells back, "Well, how can I help it?"

BLEPYROS: If I'd been there I would have said, "Grind up garlic and figs and add Spartan spurge, and rub the mixture on your eyelids at bedtime."

CHREMES: After him, that success-story Euaion⁸⁴ stepped forward—wearing only a shirt, most people thought, though he insisted he was wearing a coat. 380 His speech appealed mainly to the masses: "You see that I'm in need of salvation myself—about four bits would do it—but nevertheless I shall tell you how to save the polis and her people. If the clothiers were to donate coats at the winter solstice to those who need them, none of us would ever again catch pneumonia. And you should allow anyone without a bed or a blanket 385 to sleep in the tanneries⁸⁵ after they've 'washed up';⁸⁶ if a tanner won't open his doors in wintertime, fine him three comforters!"

BLEPYROS: By Dionysos, what a noble thought! He would have won unanimous approval if he'd added that grain-dealers should give the needy three quarts for their dinner or face punishment. They could have collected that benefit from Nausikydes!⁸⁷ 390

CHREMES: Well, after that a pale, good-looking young man⁸⁸ sprang to his feet to address the people—looked very much like Nikias.⁸⁹ He made a case for handing the polis over to the women! And they all cheered and yelled their approval, this mass of cobblers, while the people from the country made deep rumbles. 395

BLEPYROS: They had sense, by god!

CHREMES: But they were the minority, and the speaker drowned them out. In his view, women could do no wrong, and you no right.

BLEPYROS: What were his arguments? 400

CHREMES: First, he called you a criminal.

BLEPYROS: And what did he call you?

CHREMES: I'll get to that. Then he called you a crook.

BLEPYROS: Only me?

CHREMES: That's right, and an informer too.

405

BLEPYROS: Only me?

CHREMES: That's right, you and [*indicating the spectators*] this crowd here as well!

BLEPYROS: Well, that's a different story—who'd deny that?

CHREMES: He went on to say that a woman is a creature bursting with brains and productive of profit, and furthermore that women never divulge the secrets of the Thesmophoria,⁹⁰ by contrast with you and me, who leak what we say in Council all the time.

410

BLEPYROS: By Hermes, that last point's fair enough.

CHREMES: Then he said that women lend each other dresses, jewelry, money, drinking cups, privately and without witnesses,⁹¹ and always return everything with nothing held back; while most of us men, he said, cheat.

415

BLEPYROS: By Poseidon, we cheat even when there are witnesses!

CHREMES: He included other items in his long eulogy of the women: that they don't inform on people, don't sue them, don't try to overthrow the democracy, but instead do it lots of good.

420

BLEPYROS: And what was voted?

CHREMES: To turn the polis over to *them*. That seemed to be the only thing that hasn't been tried.

BLEPYROS: And this passed?

CHREMES: That's what I'm telling you.

425

BLEPYROS: They've been put in charge of everything that used to be the business of the citizens?

CHREMES: That's the way it is.

BLEPYROS: So I won't be going to court anymore, but my wife will?

CHREMES: And you won't be taking care of your dependants anymore—your wife will.

430

BLEPYROS: And I won't have to groan myself awake at dawn anymore?

CHREMES: God no, all that's the women's concern now; you can stop groaning and stay at home farting all day long!

BLEPYROS: But there lies the danger for men our age:⁹² once they've taken the reins of power they'll force us against our will to— 435

CHREMES: To what?

BLEPYROS: To screw them!

CHREMES: And what if we can't?

BLEPYROS: They won't make us breakfast! 440

CHREMES: By Zeus you'd better this then [*miming cunnilingus*]: then you could eat breakfast and screw at the same time.

BLEPYROS: But it's absolutely terrible when you're forced!

CHREMES: But if this is the policy of the polis, every true man's got to do his part! 445

BLEPYROS: Well, there is that traditional saying: however brainless and foolish our policies may be, all our affairs will turn out for the best.

CHREMES: And I hope they do turn out for the best, Lady Pallas⁹³ and all you Gods! Well, I've got to go. Be well, friend. [*He walks offstage.*]

BLEPYROS: You too, Chremes! [*He goes inside his house.*] 450

CHORAL INTERLUDE

[*The Chorus begins to return in small groups to the orchestra, still costumed as men.*]

CHORUS-LEADER [*still offstage, shepherding the women*]: Forward march! Is any man following us? Turn around, take a look, guard yourselves carefully—lots of no-good men about—one of them might be at our rear, inspecting our deportment!

CHORUS (*strophe*):

Right! As you march along
see that you stomp your feet
as loud as you can.

Getting caught red-handed in this business

would disgrace us in our husbands' eyes.
 And so stay closely wrapped,
 look this way and that,
 left and right,
 to avoid catastrophe for our operation.

460

CHORUS-LEADER: Come, let's make the dust fly: we're near the place where
 we first set off for the Assembly. We can see the house now where our
 commander lives, who thought up the plan that the citizens have now
 enacted.

465

CHORUS (*antistrophe*):

So we've no further need to hang around
 with these beards stuck on our chins;
 someone might see us in the daylight
 and maybe turn us in!
 So come this way, into the shade
 by the house-wall, keeping an eye peeled,
 and change yourselves back to the way you were.

470

CHORUS-LEADER: And don't dally, for I see this commander of ours coming
 this way from the Assembly. Everyone, get a move on, get rid of those
 hateful hairbags on your cheeks; we've grudgingly worn them for a long
 time now.

475

EPISODE

[*Praxagora enters and moves to the doorway of her house, removing her beard.*]

PRAXAGORA [*to the Chorus*]: We're in luck, ladies: the business has turned out as
 we planned. But now you must get rid of those suits and kick off those shoes
 as quick as you can, before anyone sees them. You, undo the knotted reins
 Lakonian. Lose the walking-sticks. [*To the Chorus-Leader*] And you, get these
 women into some kind of order! I'd like to sneak back into the house before
 my husband sees me, and put his suit back where I got it, and all this other
 stuff I borrowed.

480

485

CHORUS-LEADER [*after the chorus have removed all their male costuming*]:

Everything's off, just as you ordered. We're ready for further instructions and
 will obediently do whatever you think is most helpful to you. For I know that
 I've never encountered a woman more impressive than you are.

PRAXAGORA: Then stick around: I'll use all of you as counsellors in running the office I've been elected to. Yes, at the Assembly, amid hubbub and danger, you were all very manly! 490

[Just as Praxagora starts to open her door, Blepyros emerges, still dressed in her clothes.]

BLEPYROS: It's you! Where have you been, Praxagora?

PRAXAGORA: Is that any of your business, sir?

BLEPYROS: Any of my business? What innocence!

PRAXAGORA: Now don't start saying I've been at some lover's house. 495

BLEPYROS: Maybe more than one!

PRAXAGORA: OK then, there's a way for you to test it.

BLEPYROS: How?

PRAXAGORA: See if you can smell perfume on me.

BLEPYROS: What? Can't a woman get fucked without perfume? 500

PRAXAGORA: Not I—more's the pity.

BLEPYROS: Then why did you leave the house so early, without telling me, and taking my coat with you?

PRAXAGORA: A woman I know, a dear friend, was in labor and asked me to attend her. 505

BLEPYROS: And so you couldn't let me know you were leaving?

PRAXAGORA: And not give a thought to a woman brought to bed, husband, in her condition?

BLEPYROS: You could at least have told me. There's something fishy here!

PRAXAGORA: Not at all, by the Twain. I dropped everything and went as I was. The maid who came for me asked me to come right away. 510

BLEPYROS: Then shouldn't you have taken your own dress with you. Instead, you swiped my coat and threw your slip over me, leaving me there like a corpse at the undertaker's—you all but laid me out with a wreath and urn!

PRAXAGORA: It was cold outside, and I'm thin and delicate, so I put this on to keep warm. But before I left I made sure you were snugly covered, husband. 515

BLEPYROS: And why did my Spartan boots go with you, and my walking-stick?

PRAXAGORA: I didn't want your coat to get stolen, so I put these on to sound like you, stomping my feet and poking at stones with the stick. 520

BLEPYROS: You realize you've cost us eight quarts of wheat—what I'd have gotten by attending Assembly?

PRAXAGORA: Don't worry about it: she had a baby boy!⁹⁴

BLEPYROS: Who, the Assembly?

PRAXAGORA: No no, the woman I attended! So, an Assembly was held? 525

BLEPYROS: God yes. Don't you remember me telling you about it yesterday?

PRAXAGORA: Yes, now I remember.

BLEPYROS: So you don't even know what's been decided?

PRAXAGORA: No idea.

BLEPYROS: Well, sit down and chew cuttlefish! They say you women are in charge of the polis. 530

PRAXAGORA: To do what? Our knitting?

BLEPYROS: No, by Zeus: to govern!

PRAXAGORA: Govern whom?

BLEPYROS: All the city's affairs. 535

PRAXAGORA: Then, by Aphrodite, the polis has a rosy future in store.

BLEPYROS: How do you figure?

PRAXAGORA: For lots of reasons. From now on aggressive people won't be allowed to treat the polis shamefully in any way: no more perjury, no more trumped-up charges— 540

BLEPYROS: Good heavens, don't do that! You'll take away my livelihood!

[Neighbor has come out of his house to listen.]

NEIGHBOR: Please, friend, let your wife talk.

PRAXAGORA:—no more mugging, no more envying the next guy, no more wearing rags, no more poor people, no more wrangling, no more dunning and repossessing. 545

NEIGHBOR: Poseidon, that would be great, if it's true.

PRAXAGORA: Let me explain it; you'll have to agree that I'm right, and even my mister here will have nothing to say against me.

DEBATE

CHORUS:⁹⁵

Now you must summon up a shrewd intelligence
 and a mind sage in the task of defending your comrades! 550
 For it's to the prosperity of all alike
 that your creative ingenuity
 will gladden the lives of the citizens
 with countless benefits—
 now is the time to show what that ingenuity can do! 555
 You know how much our polis needs some sage plan;
 describe it in full, making sure only
 that it's never been said or done before:
 [*indicating the spectators*] for they hate to watch
 the same old stuff again and again! 560

CHORUS-LEADER: No more delay! Here and now you must put your idea in
 play: what the audience most appreciates is instant gratification!

PRAXAGORA: Well, then, I'm sure my proposals are worthwhile, but I'm
 awfully worried about the spectators: are they ready to quarry a new vein and
 not stick with what's hoary and conventional? 565

NEIGHBOR: Don't worry about quarrying what's new: for us, indifference to
 precedent takes precedence over any other principle of government!⁹⁶

PRAXAGORA: Then let no one object or interrupt until you've heard the
 speaker out and understand the plan. Very well: I propose that everyone
 should own everything in common and draw an equal living. No more rich 570
 man here, poor man there; no more division between the man with a big
 farm and the man without land enough to be buried in; between the man
 with many slaves and the man without even an attendant; no, I will establish
 one and the same standard of life for everyone.

BLEPYROS: How will it be the same for everyone? 575

PRAXAGORA [*crossly*]: If we were eating dung you'd grab the first bite!

BLEPYROS: We'll be sharing the dung too?

PRAXAGORA: God no! I mean you jumped in with the point I was about to
 make! As I was about to say, my first act will be to communize everyone's
 land, money and other property. We women will manage this central pool 580
 with thrift and good judgment, and we'll take good care of you.⁹⁷

NEIGHBOR: And what about the man who owns no land but has gold and silver stashed away?

PRAXAGORA: He'll contribute it to the central pool.

BLEPYROS: And if he refuses, he'll perjure himself: after all, that's how he got the money in the first place! 585

PRAXAGORA: But look, it won't be of any use to him anyway.

BLEPYROS: What do you mean?

PRAXAGORA: No one will be forced to do anything out of poverty: everyone will have all the necessities: bread, salt fish, barley-cakes, cloaks, wine, garlands, chickpeas. So where's his profit in not contributing? If you can find it, do tell me. 590

BLEPYROS: Isn't it true that the people who have all this now are the biggest thieves?

NEIGHBOR: Before now, my friend, yes, when we lived under the previous system. But now that everyone will be living from a common fund, where's the profit in holding out? 595

BLEPYROS: What if someone fancies a girl⁹⁸ and wants the pleasure of a poke? He'll take her price from this common fund, and when he's slept with her he'll have all that's commonly wanted. 600

PRAXAGORA: No, he'll be able to sleep with her free of charge. I'm making these girls common property for the men to sleep with and make babies with as they please.

BLEPYROS: Then won't everyone be looking for the prettiest girl and trying to bang her? 605

PRAXAGORA: The second-rate and the bob-nosed will sit right beside the classy ones, and if a man wants the latter he'll have to ball the ugly ones first.⁹⁹

BLEPYROS: But what about us older men? If we go with the ugly ones first, our cocks won't have anything left when we get to where the classy ones are! 610

PRAXAGORA: They won't complain, don't worry about it. Never fear, they won't complain.

BLEPYROS: What do you mean? Complain about what?

PRAXAGORA: About not getting to sleep with you! Anyway, you've got that problem as it is. 615

BLEPYROS: Your side of the equation makes a certain sense; you’ve planned it that no woman’s hole will go unplugged. But what do you mean to do for the men? The women will shun the ugly ones and make for the handsome ones!

PRAXAGORA: Well, the ugly men will have to tail the handsome men as they leave their dinner-parties, and keep an eye on the public places, for it won’t be lawful for the tall and handsome to sleep with any women who haven’t first accommodated the uglies and the runts. 620

BLEPYROS: So I suppose Lysikrates¹⁰⁰ will now be sticking up his nose with the best of them! 625

PRAXAGORA: By Apollo, he will. And what’s more, the idea favors ordinary people. It’ll be a great joke on the big shots with their signet rings when a guy wearing sneakers speaks up and says, “Step aside and wait till I’m finished; then I’ll give you sloppy seconds!”

BLEPYROS: But under your regime, how in the world will any man be able to recognize his own children?¹⁰¹ 630

PRAXAGORA: Why should he? Everyone in the younger generation will consider all older men to be their fathers.

BLEPYROS: I suppose that from now on sons will start methodically strangling each and every older man, since they strangle their acknowledged fathers as it is. What will they do to a *stranger*? Not only strangle him but shit on his corpse too! 635

PRAXAGORA: But the bystanders won’t allow that! Nobody used to interfere with sons who beat up their fathers, but now if someone hears a man being beaten he’ll be afraid that the victim is his own father and he’ll fight the attackers. 640

BLEPYROS: That’s all well and good, but if Epikouros or Leukolophos start hanging around and calling me “daddy” it’s going to be awful.

NEIGHBOR: Well, I can think of even more awful things.

BLEPYROS: Such as? 645

NEIGHBOR: If Aristyllos¹⁰² claims you’re his father and kisses you!

BLEPYROS: If he does he’ll sorely regret it!

NEIGHBOR: And you’d smell of *eau d’ordure*!

PRAXAGORA: But he was born before our decree, so there’s no need to worry that he’ll be kissing you. 650

BLEPYROS: He'd have been sorry if he had! But who will there be to farm the land?

PRAXAGORA: The slaves. Your only concern will be to get all slicked up when the shadow-clock says it's time for dinner.

BLEPYROS: And overcoats: who will supply them? It's a reasonable question. 655

PRAXAGORA: The current stock will do for now; later we'll weave you new ones.¹⁰³

BLEPYROS: One more question: what happens if someone loses a lawsuit? How will he pay his expenses? It wouldn't be fair to take *these* from the common pool. 660

PRAXAGORA: There won't be any lawsuits in the first place.

BLEPYROS: That statement will be your undoing!

NEIGHBOR: I think so too.

PRAXAGORA: But why *should* there be any lawsuits, poor dear?

BLEPYROS: For lots of reasons, by Apollo. To give just one example: when a debtor refuses to repay. 665

PRAXAGORA: But where did the creditor get the money to lend? If all funds are common, he's got to be a thief!

NEIGHBOR: By Demeter, she's right!

BLEPYROS: But let her answer me this: a dinner party ends in assault; how are the fighters going to pay their fines? I think I've got you in a corner now! 670

PRAXAGORA: They'll pay out of their own food-allowance. A decrease *there* will hit them right in the belly, so they'll think twice before they get rowdy again.

BLEPYROS: No more thieves, then?

PRAXAGORA: Of course not: why would anyone steal what he's got a share in? 675

BLEPYROS: No more muggers at night?

NEIGHBOR: Not if you sleep at home!

PRAXAGORA: Not even when you go out, as was previously the case. All will be content with their condition. If someone demands your cloak, let him have it. Why put up a fight? Go to the common store and get yourself a better one. 680

BLEPYROS: Won't people still gamble at dice?

PRAXAGORA: To win what?

BLEPYROS: And what standard of living will you establish?

PRAXAGORA: The same for all. I propose to remodel the city, knocking down all partitions and remodeling it into one big household, where everyone can come and go as they please. 685

BLEPYROS: And where will you serve dinner?

PRAXAGORA: I'll turn all the courthouses and porticoes into dining-rooms.

BLEPYROS: What will you do with the speakers' platforms?

PRAXAGORA: I'll use them to store mixing-bowls and water-jugs, and the children can use them to recite epics about brave men in battle—or about anyone who was cowardly, so he'll be ashamed to share the meal. 690

BLEPYROS: By Apollo, what a charming idea! And what will you do with the ballot boxes?

PRAXAGORA: I'll have them set up in the marketplace by Harmodios' statue and use them for allotment: everyone will draw his lot and go off happily to whatever place at table the lot assigns. Thus the Herald will instruct everyone with the letter R to proceed to dinner at the Royal Stoa; the Thetas will go to the appropriate place; the G's to the Grain Market. 695

BLEPYROS: G as in guzzle? 700

PRAXAGORA: No, as in gourmandize.

BLEPYROS: But the guy who draws a blank—will everyone push him away from the table?

PRAXAGORA: That won't happen with us, for we'll provide everything for everyone unstintingly. Every single man will go away drunk, with his garland still on and a torch in his hand, and as they go through the streets after dinner the ladies will accost them: "Come to my place! There's a fine young girl in here!" "And over here," another one will cry from a second-story window, "is a very fine and exquisitely pale girl! You may sleep with her after you've slept with me first!" And the inferior men will chase after the handsome young lads, saying "Hey you, where do you think you're running off to? You're not going to get anything anyway: the law says the ladies've got to fuck the pug-nosed and the ugly men first. Meanwhile you can grab the petals of your double-hung fig-branch and jerk off in the doorway!" So tell me, does my plan meet with your approval? 705
710
715

BLEPYROS AND NEIGHBOR: Absolutely!¹⁰⁴

PRAXAGORA: Then I'll be going off to the marketplace to receive the goods as they come in; I'll pick up a girl with a loud voice to be my crier; these are my duties as the woman elected to rule. I must also organize the communal dinners, and I'd like you to have your first banquet this very day.

720

BLEPYROS: The banquets are to start right away?

PRAXAGORA: That's what I'm telling you. Then I want to put a stop to all prostitution.

BLEPYROS: Why?

NEIGHBOR [*indicating Praxagora and the Chorus*]: That's obvious: so that these women can have the best young men all to themselves!

725

PRAXAGORA: Correct. What's more, slave-girls will no longer be allowed to wear make-up and steal away the fond hearts of the free boys.¹⁰⁵ They'll be allowed to sleep only with slaves and may trim their pussies only in the style of a woollen barn-jacket!¹⁰⁶

730

BLEPYROS: Say, I'd like to tag along, right at your side, and share the spotlight, with people saying, "Look, that's none other than the Lady Commander's husband!"

[*Praxagora and Blepys depart for the marketplace.*]¹⁰⁷

NEIGHBOR: As for me, if I'm to be taking my possessions to the marketplace, I'd better collect them all and take inventory of what I've got. [*He goes into one of the houses.*]

735

EPISODE¹⁰⁸

[*The Chorus sing a brief song, not preserved, after which the Neighbor comes out of his house, followed by two slaves who bring out household utensils and, on the Neighbor's instructions, line them up on the street outside the doorway.*]

NEIGHBOR [*addressing the utensils as if they were women forming up a festive procession*]: You there, my pretty Miss Sifter, first of my possessions, come outside here prettily: you'll be the Basket-Bearer,¹⁰⁹ being well powdered—after emptying so many sacks of my flour! And who will be the Chair-Bearer? Miss Pot, come outside here. By Zeus, you're black! You must have boiled the concoction Lysikrates uses to dye his hair! This way, stand next to her; you're the Maid-In-Waiting. Water-Bearer, bring this water-jug over here. And you come over here as Lyre-Player—since you've so often woken me up too early,

740

in the middle of the night, to go off to Assembly, with your morning tune.¹¹⁰
 Whoever's got the Bowl come forward; bring the honeycombs, and put the
 branches down beside them; bring out the Tripod and the Oil Flask. You may 745
 now produce the little things: they'll be the rest of the parade.

[As Neighbor forms up his line of goods, a citizen walks by and regards him scornfully.]

SELFISH MAN: Imagine me turning in my stuff! I'd be a sorry excuse for a man,
 and virtually brainless. Never, by Poseidon! First of all I'll have to test and
 study the situation very carefully. On the strength of mere words I'm hardly
 about to throw away the fruits of my sweat and thriftiness in this sort of 750
 mindless way, not until I've made thorough inquiries about the entire affair.
 [Walking up to Neighbor.] You there! What's the meaning of these utensils here?
 Are you moving? Are you pawning them?

NEIGHBOR: Neither.

SELFISH MAN: Then why are they lined up like this? It's not a procession you 755
 people are arranging for Hieron the auctioneer, is it?

NEIGHBOR: God no! We're getting them ready to go to the marketplace for
 surrender to the polis: it's the law of the land.

SELFISH MAN: You mean to turn them in?

NEIGHBOR: Of course. 760

SELFISH MAN: Then, Zeus save us, you're a fool!

NEIGHBOR: How so?

SELFISH MAN: It's easy to see.

NEIGHBOR: Really? Am I not supposed to obey the law?

SELFISH MAN: The law? You're pitiful! 765

NEIGHBOR: The law that's been duly enacted!

SELFISH MAN: Duly enacted! How stupid can you get?

NEIGHBOR: Stupid?

SELFISH MAN: Well, aren't you? And not just stupid, but the most simple-
 minded man in the world? 770

NEIGHBOR: Because I do what I'm told?

SELFISH MAN: So you think the man of sense ought to do what he's told?

NEIGHBOR: Above everything else.

SELFISH MAN: No, that's what the *imbecile* does!

NEIGHBOR: So you don't intend to turn in your goods?

775

SELFISH MAN: I intend to be cautious; first I want to see what everyone else does.

NEIGHBOR: Why, they're getting ready to turn in their goods, of course!

SELFISH MAN: Well, I'll believe it when I see it.

NEIGHBOR: That's what they're saying around town, anyway.

780

SELFISH MAN: Say it? Sure they will.

NEIGHBOR: They're promising to carry in their stuff personally.

SELFISH MAN: Promise? Sure they will.

NEIGHBOR: You'll be the death of me with your total skepticism!

SELFISH MAN: Be skeptical? Sure they will.

785

NEIGHBOR: Zeus destroy you!

SELFISH MAN: Destroy? Sure they will: the plan, that is! Look, do you really think that anyone with a brain is going to turn in their stuff? That's not in our national character!

NEIGHBOR: You mean, we should only *take*?

790

SELFISH MAN: Zeus, yes! The gods are the same way. Just look at their statues and you'll see that: whenever we pray to them to give us something, they stand there with their hands out, palm up, not to give us something but to get something from us!

NEIGHBOR: Listen, you nut, let me get on with my business here. These things need to be packed. Where's the twine? [*He and the slaves begin to wrap up the utensils.*]

795

SELFISH MAN: You're really going to do it?

NEIGHBOR: Zeus yes. Look, I'm wrapping up these tripods here.

SELFISH MAN: What foolishness, not to wait and see what others are going to do, and then and only then—

800

NEIGHBOR: Do what?

SELFISH MAN:—wait a little longer, then put it off.

NEIGHBOR: The object being what?

SELFISH MAN: There might be an earthquake, or some ill-omened lightning, or a black cat darting across the street. That would put a stop to their depositions, you mental case! 805

NEIGHBOR: Well, wouldn't I be delighted if I waited and then found there was no more room to deposit this stuff!

SELFISH MAN: No more room! Don't worry, they'll take your deposit even if you wait a couple of days. 810

NEIGHBOR: What do you mean?

SELFISH MAN [*indicating the spectators*]: I know these people: they're quick to vote on something, then they turn around and refuse to abide by it.

NEIGHBOR: They'll bring in their stuff, my friend.

SELFISH MAN: And what if they don't? 815

NEIGHBOR: Don't worry, they will.

SELFISH MAN: I repeat, what if they don't?

NEIGHBOR: We'll fight them!

SELFISH MAN: And what if they outnumber you?

NEIGHBOR: I'll leave my stuff and go home. 820

SELFISH MAN: And if they sell your stuff?

NEIGHBOR: Blast you to bits!

SELFISH MAN: And if I'm blasted to bits?

NEIGHBOR: You'll be doing a great service.

SELFISH MAN: Do you really want to surrender your stuff? 825

NEIGHBOR: I do. [*Indicating the spectators*] And I see my own neighbors doing the same.

SELFISH MAN: Antisthenes would contribute his stuff—sure! It would suit him much better to take a month-long shit first!

NEIGHBOR: Damn! 830

SELFISH MAN: And Kallimachos the chorus-master: would he contribute anything?

NEIGHBOR: More than Kallias.

SELFISH MAN [*to the spectators*]: This guy's gonna lose everything he has!

NEIGHBOR: That's putting it pretty drastically.

835

SELFISH MAN: Not at all. As if I don't see decrees like this all the time! Don't you remember the one about salt imports?

NEIGHBOR: Sure.

SELFISH MAN: And how we voted in the matter of the bronze coinage—remember that?

840

NEIGHBOR: Yes, that was certainly bad for me! After I sold my grapes I shoved off with a mouthful of those coppers, over to the market for barley, and as soon as I held out my sack the crier yelled, "Bronze coins are no longer honored; we're back to silver now."

SELFISH MAN: And didn't we all recently swear that the polis would raise talents from the two and a half percent tax levied by Heurippides?¹¹¹ And how Heurippides was everyone's golden boy? But finally we looked into the matter more carefully and it turned out to be just the same old story, a quite inadequate measure; then Heurippides became everyone's tar baby.

845

NEIGHBOR: But all that's different, sir: we were in power then; now the women are.

850

SELFISH MAN: And I mean to keep an eye on them, by Poseidon, so they don't piss all over me!

NEIGHBOR: I don't know what you're going on about. [To one of his slaves] Boy, pick up that baggage.

855

[Enter a female Herald.]

HERALDESS [to the spectators]: Now hear this, all you citizens—you heard correctly: in the new arrangement *all* citizens are included: get a move on and go straight to the Lady Commander's place, where the luck of the draw will determine where each man among you will be dining. The tables are set and heaped high with every kind of goodie, and the dining couches are draped with cushions and coverlets. They're mixing the wine in bowls, and the perfume-girls are standing by. The fish fillets are on the grill; they're spitting hares; the rolls are in the oven; they're weaving garlands; the desserts are baking; the little girls are boiling pots of pea soup. Smoios is with them, wearing his riding-suit, ready to lick at the women's boxes. And old man Geron's there wearing a new suit and fashionable pumps, joking with another young blade; his old boots and shabby cloak lie discarded. This is what you're invited to: come along! The slaves are waiting with your daily bread: just open your mouths! [Exit Heraldess.]

860

865

SELFISH MAN: Well, if that's how things are going, I'm ready to go! Why stand
around here when the polis is throwing us a party? 870

NEIGHBOR: Just where do you think you're going, when you haven't turned in
your goods?

SELFISH MAN: To dinner!

NEIGHBOR: Oh no you don't! If the women have any sense they won't feed
you till you're paid up! 875

SELFISH MAN: Don't worry, I will be.

NEIGHBOR: When?

SELFISH MAN: I won't be holding anybody up.

NEIGHBOR: Meaning what? 880

SELFISH MAN: I mean that others are bound to turn their stuff in later than I
will.

NEIGHBOR: And you mean to go to dinner anyway?

SELFISH MAN: Sure! How can I help but go? All sensible people should
cooperate with the polis in any way they can. 885

NEIGHBOR: And what if the women won't let you in?

SELFISH MAN: I'll lower my head and charge them!

NEIGHBOR: And if they beat you like a slave?

SELFISH MAN: I'll sue them!

NEIGHBOR: And if they laugh at your threats? 890

SELFISH MAN: I'll stand in the doorway—

NEIGHBOR: And do what? Tell me!

SELFISH MAN:—and snatch the food that people come to turn in!

NEIGHBOR: In that case you'd better follow me in. [*To the slaves*] You there,
Sikon, and Parmenon too, hoist my estate. 895

SELFISH MAN: Let me help you.

NEIGHBOR: No, no thank you! I don't want to bring my contribution to the
Lady Commander and have you pretending that part of it's yours! [*The
Neighbor and his slaves depart with the goods.*]

SELFISH MAN: By Zeus, I need some kind of scheme to save the property I've got while at the same time sharing in the goodies these people are getting. [He ponders.] I think I've got it! I've got to run off to dinner with the rest of them, and quick! [Runs after the Neighbor.] 900

[Here the Chorus performed, but the text is not preserved.]

EPISODE¹¹²

[In the doorway of one of the stage houses is an old woman, and at the upper window of the house next door is a young girl; both look anxiously up and down the street.]

FIRST OLD WOMAN: Where in the world are the men? Dinner must be over by now! Here I am, all plastered with makeup and wearing my party dress, just standing around, whistling myself a song, with my trap all set to catch one of the men who walk by. Ye Muses, descend to these my lips with some spicy Ionian tune! 905

GIRL: This time you've got downstairs ahead of me, old hag. You thought you'd strip the vines when I wasn't looking and entice some guy with your singing! If you try it, I'll sing a song of my own. And if the audience expects this to be boring, I trust they'll find something sweet and comic in it anyway. 910

FIRST OLD WOMAN [pointing to her rump]: Put your complaints in here, and get lost! [To the flute-player in the orchestra] You, my dear little piper, take up your pipes and blow us the kind of tune that's wanted here. 915

Whoever wants to have a good time,
he's gotta sleep with me!
Finesse dwells not in girls
but in grown-up women!
No one's readier than I 920
to take really good care
of the boyfriend I live with
and never fly off to another man.

GIRL:

Don't despise the girls,
for softness resides 925
in their tender thighs
and blossoms on their boobs.
But you, old bag, tweeze your hair
and paint your face:
the Grim Reaper's heartthrob! 930

FIRST OLD WOMAN:

I hope your twat falls off
 and when you hanker for humping
 you can't find your back seat!
 And in bed when you're ready for kissing
 I hope you open up your arms
 and hug a snake!

935

GIRL:

Ah, what will become of me?
 My boyfriend hasn't come,
 I'm alone in the house,
 my mother's gone out:
 need I say any more?
 Well, granny, you better call
 Doctor Dildo
 so you can enjoy yourself!
 Pretty please!

940

945

FIRST OLD WOMAN:

Poor thing, you're already
 itching for the Ionian toy,¹¹³
 and it looks like you also want
 to suck like the Lesbians.¹¹⁴

950

GIRL:

But you'll never snatch
 my boytoys away,
 nor spoil my youth
 or take it from me!

FIRST OLD WOMAN: Well, sing any tune you like and prow! around like a cat:
 no man's going to visit you before me! 955

GIRL: Not for my funeral, anyway! That's a new one, old hag!

FIRST OLD WOMAN: Oh no: who can tell an old lady anything new? It's not
 my age that'll hurt you.

GIRL: What then? Your makeup and rouge? 960

FIRST OLD WOMAN: Are you still talking?

GIRL: Are you still hanging out of the doorway?

FIRST OLD WOMAN: Me? I'm singing for my sweetheart Epigenes.

GIRL: You've got a sweetheart? You must mean Father Time!

FIRST OLD WOMAN: Even you'll have to admit it, since he'll soon be coming to see me! [*Epigenes, wearing his banquet garland and holding a torch, walks tipsily up the street.*] In fact, here he comes now! 965

GIRL: Not for you, old pest; he's got no business there!

FIRST OLD WOMAN: Au contraire, miss twiggly!

GIRL: You'll see I'm right, you moldy old hag; I'm going inside! [*She disappears from the window.*] 970

FIRST OLD WOMAN: Me too; you'll see that my confidence is much more justified than yours! [*She ducks inside the door, but comes out again as soon as the Girl is gone.*]

EPIGENES:¹¹⁵

How I wish I could sleep with the girl 975
and not have to bang a pug-nosed crone first!
That doesn't sit well with a free man!

FIRST OLD WOMAN [*unheard by Epigenes*]:

You'll bang to your sorrow then, by Zeus;
the days of Charixene are past!¹¹⁶ 980
If this is still a democracy,
we've got to do it legal and proper!
But I'll go inside to see what he's going to do. [*She ducks inside again, but leaves the door slightly ajar.*]

EPIGENES: Ye gods, just let me get the pretty girl alone! It's her I got drunk to visit and her I've so long been longing for! 985

GIRL [*appearing in her window*]: I've completely fooled the damnable old thing; she's gone inside, thinking that I'm going to stay inside. But here's the very boy we were talking about!

Hither now, hither now, 990
my dear one,
come to me and be
my bedmate tonight!
A powerful passion
sets me aw whirl 995
for your curly hair!
What is this strange longing
that attacks me and holds me

in its grinding grip?
 Release me, Eros, I beg you! 1000
 Please make this boy
 come to my very own bed!

EPIGENES:

Hither now, hither now,
 my dear one,
 run to the door for me 1005
 and open it wide!
 If you don't I'll fall down
 and die!
 I want to lie in your lap
 and play see-saw with your butt! 1010
 Aphrodite, why have you driven
 me mad for this girl?
 Release me, Eros, I beg you!
 Please make this girl
 come to my very own bed! 1015
 And yet nothing I've said
 comes near to matching my need!
 I beg you, dearest,
 open the door for me,
 throw your arms around me; 1020
 I'm hurting for you!
 Oh my gold-bauble delight,
 flower of Aphrodite,
 honeybee of the Muses,
 child of the Graces, 1025
 personification of utter
 voluptuousness,
 open the door for me,
 throw your arms around me;
 I'm hurting for you! 1030

[He knocks at the Girl's door, but before she can come down to him the First Old Woman bursts from her doorway and accosts him.]

FIRST OLD WOMAN: Hey you, what's this knocking? Looking for me, are you?

EPIGENES [recoiling]: Surely you jest!

FIRST OLD WOMAN: Yes you are; you were banging on my door!

EPIGENES: I'll be damned if I was!

FIRST OLD WOMAN: Well, what is your business, then, with the torch and all? 1035

EPIGENES: I'm looking for a fellow from Wankton.

FIRST OLD WOMAN: Which one?

EPIGENES: Not Mr. Humpus, whom you're perhaps expecting.

FIRST OLD WOMAN [*seizing him by the arm*]: By Aphrodite, whether you like it
or not— 1040

EPIGENES [*shaking her off*]: Wait, I'm not in your jurisdiction; the statute of
limitations is sixty years! You're tabled. I'm involved only in cases under
twenty!

FIRST OLD WOMAN: That might have been true under the old system, my
sweet; but according to current law you've got to deal with me first. 1045

EPIGENES: When gambling it's legal to pass the deal.

FIRST OLD WOMAN: You didn't obey that law when you had your dinner.

EPIGENES: I don't know what you're talking about. I've got to bang on this
door.

FIRST OLD WOMAN [*pointing to her crotch*]: Not until you bang this one first! 1050

EPIGENES: No thanks, I don't need a bucket just now.

FIRST OLD WOMAN: I know you like me; you were just surprised to see me
here. Come on, give us a kiss.

EPIGENES [*retreating*]: No! I'm, ah, terrified of your lover!

FIRST OLD WOMAN: Who's that? 1055

EPIGENES: The best-selling painter.

FIRST OLD WOMAN: Who are you talking about?

EPIGENES: The one who decorates funeral urns. Better get out of here before
he spots you in the doorway!

FIRST OLD WOMAN: I know what you want, I know! 1060

EPIGENES: And I know what you want, by Zeus!

FIRST OLD WOMAN: By Aphrodite, who gave me the luck of the draw, I'm not
giving you up!

EPIGENES: You're a crazy old lady!

FIRST OLD WOMAN [*waggling her fingers at him*]: Nonsense! I'm personally going to escort you to my bed! 1065

EPIGENES: Why do we need tongs for our buckets, when we could run a crone like this down the well and use *her* to haul them up?

FIRST OLD WOMAN: Very funny, my boy! But you just get over here to my place! 1070

EPIGENES: No! I don't have to obey you unless you've paid the polis the 2% tax on me.

FIRST OLD WOMAN: By Aphrodite, you do too! I just *love* sleeping with boys your age!

EPIGENES: And I just *hate* sleeping with women your age! I'll never consent. 1075

FIRST OLD WOMAN [*producing a piece of paper*]: This will make you, by Zeus!

EPIGENES: What is it?

FIRST OLD WOMAN: The regulation that says you've got to come to me.

EPIGENES: Tell me what in the world it says.

FIRST OLD WOMAN: All right, I shall. [*Reading*] The women have decreed: "if a young man desires a young woman he may not hump her until he first bangs an old woman. Should he in his desire for the young woman refuse to do this preliminary banging, the older women shall be entitled with impunity to drag off the young man by his pecker." 1080

EPIGENES: Dear me, this very day I'm to be Prokrustes!¹¹⁷ 1085

FIRST OLD WOMAN: Our laws must be obeyed!

EPIGENES: What if one of my fellow demesmen or friends comes and goes bail for me?

FIRST OLD WOMAN: No man is any longer permitted to transact business over the one-bushel limit!¹¹⁸ 1090

EPIGENES: Can't I swear off my duty?

FIRST OLD WOMAN: You can't squirm out of this duty!

EPIGENES: I'll get myself exempted as a merchant.

FIRST OLD WOMAN: You'll be sorry if you do!

EPIGENES: So what am I to do?

1095

FIRST OLD WOMAN: Follow me into my house.

EPIGENES: Is it a necessity?

FIRST OLD WOMAN: Diomedes' necessity!¹¹⁹

EPIGENES:¹²⁰ In that case, begin by strewing the bier with marjoram and four broken vine-branches as kindling, and deck it with ribbons, and put the urn beside it, and set the water-jug outside the door.

1100

FIRST OLD WOMAN: Surely you're going to buy me a wedding garland too.

EPIGENES: Yes, by Zeus, provided I can find a waxen one somewhere,¹²¹ because I think you're going to disintegrate pretty quick in there!

[As the First Old Woman draws Epigenes into her house, the Girl emerges from her doorway.]

GIRL: Where are you dragging him off to?

1105

FIRST OLD WOMAN: I'm bringing my own man home!

GIRL: That's not very prudent. He's the wrong age to be sleeping with you—you're more his mother than his wife! If you old women start enforcing a law like this, you'll fill the whole country up with Oedipuses!¹²² [She steps between Epigenes and the First Old Woman.]

1110

FIRST OLD WOMAN: You dirty slut, you've thought up this objection out of pure envy. But I'll make you pay for it. [She goes into her house.]

EPIGENES [embracing the Girl]: By Zeus the Savior, sweetest, you've done me a favor by getting that crone off my back! When the lights are out I'll slip you a big, juicy token of my gratitude! [The Girl leads him toward her door.]

1115

[Enter a Second Old Woman, older and uglier than the First.]

SECOND OLD WOMAN [to the Girl]: Hey you! Where are you taking him, in violation of the law? It's clearly stated that he's got to sleep with me first.

EPIGENES: Good grief! Where did you pop out of, you apparition of damnation! This one's even more revolting than the last one!

SECOND OLD WOMAN: Get over here!

1120

EPIGENES [to the Girl, who runs in terror back to her own house]: Don't let her drag me away, I beg you!

SECOND OLD WOMAN: Not I but the law drags you away!

EPIGENES: No, some kind of Empousa¹²³ covered with one big blood-blister!

SECOND OLD WOMAN [*pushing him along the stage*]: Come along, you sissy. This way. Make it snappy and no back talk! 1125

EPIGENES: Wait! May I go to the bathroom first? It would help me get hold of myself. If you don't let me, I'll do something right here and you'll soon see me go brown with fear!

SECOND OLD WOMAN: Buck up and get moving. You can shit when we get in the house. 1130

EPIGENES: I'm afraid alright: afraid that I'll shit more than I want! But I'll be glad to deposit two valuable sureties with you (*indicating his testicles*).

SECOND OLD WOMAN [*giving him a shove*]: Don't bother.

[*Enter a Third Old Woman, older and uglier than the Second.*]

THIRD OLD WOMAN [*to Epigenes, whose back is turned*]: Hey you! Where are you going with her? 1135

EPIGENES: I'm not going anywhere; I'm being kidnapped! But whoever you are, bless you if you don't just stand by while I'm being tormented! [*He turns and takes a good look at the Third Old Woman.*] Herakles! Pan! Korybantes! Dioskouroi! That one's much more revolting than this one! Please, someone tell me what in the world it is! A monkey plastered with makeup? A crone arisen from the underworld? 1140

THIRD OLD WOMAN [*taking hold of Epigenes' arm*]: Cut the jokes and follow me.

SECOND OLD WOMAN [*holding onto Epigenes; other arm*]: Oh no you don't. This way! 1145

THIRD OLD WOMAN: I'm never letting you go!

SECOND OLD WOMAN: Me neither!

EPIGENES: You're going to rip me in half, you hellbound creatures!

SECOND OLD WOMAN: The law says you've got to follow me!

THIRD OLD WOMAN: No it doesn't, not if an even uglier old woman appears. 1150

EPIGENES: If I'm to be miserably destroyed by you two, tell me how I'm supposed to get to that pretty girl?

THIRD OLD WOMAN: That's your problem. [*She makes a sexual gesture.*] Just now you've got to do this.

EPIGENES: So which of you do I have to poke first in order to get away? 1155

THIRD OLD WOMAN: Isn't it plain? Come this way!

EPIGENES: Then make this other one let go of me!

SECOND OLD WOMAN: No! He's coming this way with me!

EPIGENES: If *she*'ll let go!

THIRD OLD WOMAN: By Zeus, I will not! 1160

SECOND OLD WOMAN: Nor will I!

EPIGENES: You two are rough enough to be ferryboat captains!

SECOND OLD WOMAN: How's that?

EPIGENES: You'd fight over your passengers hard enough to wear them out!

THIRD OLD WOMAN: Shut up and get moving. This way! 1165

SECOND OLD WOMAN: No, this way!

EPIGENES: This is obviously Kannonos' Law put into practice: I've got to appear in custody before the people and fuck my accusers!¹²⁴ But how can I manage to man both boats with a single oar?

SECOND OLD WOMAN: Just fine—after you've wolfed down a potful of love-bulbs! 1170

[Both old women try to pull Epigenes through the same doorway.]

EPIGENES: Ah what a sorry end! I'm poised on the very threshold, and getting shoved!

THIRD OLD WOMAN: That's not going to save you, because I'm going to follow you right in. 1175

EPIGENES: Gods, no! Better to grapple with one evil than two!

THIRD OLD WOMAN: By Hekate, you've got no choice in the matter.

EPIGENES [to the spectators]: Ah, thrice ill-fated me, that must fuck a decrepit woman all night and all day, and after I've got free of her, to start in again on an old toad with a funeral urn already standing by her chops! Am I not then ill-fated? Nay, a man heavily doomed, by Zeus the Savior, and unlucky, that shall be closeted with such wild beasts as these! But if the very worst really does befall me as I sail into port atop these two floozies, bury me right where I penetrated the channel. [Indicating the Third Old Woman] As for her, while she's 1180

still alive, cover her with pitch all over and put her feet in molten lead up to her ankles, then stick her over my grave instead of an urn! 1185

[The two Old Women drag Epigenes into the house and slam the door behind them.]

EPISODE

[A tipsy Maid enters and walks up to Praxagora's house.]

MAID: Blessed is our citizenry, favored is our land, and most blessed is our mistress herself, as are you women who stand at our door, and all the neighbors and fellow demesmen, and me too, the maid, with my head perfumed with fine perfumes, Zeus be praised! But those nice little bottles of Thasian wine have a much greater impact than all these fragrances: it stays in your head a long time, while those others lose their bouquet and completely evaporate. So it's far the best, yes, by far, the gods be praised! Pour me a cup neat! It makes women merry all night when we pick out the one with the best bouquet!¹²⁵ [To the Chorus] Women, tell me where master is, I mean my mistress' husband. 1190 1195

CHORUS-LEADER: If you wait right there you're bound to run into him. That's right, here he is on his way to dinner.

[Blepyros enters with his arms around two young girls and walks by the house.]

MAID: Oh master! You happy and three-times lucky man!

BLEPYROS: Who, me? 1200

MAID: Sure you, by Zeus, and like nobody else in the world! Who could be luckier? Out of more than thirty thousand citizens you're the only one who hasn't had dinner!

CHORUS-LEADER: Yes, he's a lucky fellow, you're quite right.

MAID: Hey, where can you be off to now? 1205

BLEPYROS: Why, I'm off to dinner.

MAID: By Aphrodite, you're absolutely the last one. Still, your wife told me to gather you up and escort you and these girls you've got with you. There's some Chian wine left over and some other good stuff. So don't be late. And any of you spectators who favor us, and any of you judges who's not looking elsewhere for a winner, come along with us! We'll supply everything. 1210

BLEPYROS: Why don't you address all of them, like a lady, leaving no one out? Be liberal, invite the old man, the boy, the little child: there's dinner specially made for all of them—if they hurry home! Me, I'm shoving off to my dinner now; [*indicating one of the girls*] and fortunately I've got this little torch here to light my way! 1215

CHORUS-LEADER: Then why waste time here? Come on, take these girls and get going! And while you're going offstage, I'll sing a little tune anticipating our dinner! [*Blepyros, the Maid and the girls descend from the stage into the orchestra.*] 1220
But first I want to make a small suggestion to the judges: if you're sage judges, declare me the winner by virtue of my sagacity; if you're after humor, declare me the winner by virtue of my jokes. Thus it's virtually all of you that I'm asking to vote for me. And don't hold it against me that the luck of the draw has put me onstage first. So, bearing all this in mind, don't break your oath, but always judge the choruses fairly. Don't act like dishonest whores, who only remember their latest customers! 1225

CHORUS:
Hey, hey, it's time, dear ladies,
to shake a leg and hop off to dinner,
if we mean to do it at all. 1230
So everyone move your feet
to a Cretan tune!

BLEPYROS: That's what I'm doing!

CHORUS:
And these women here,
with their wonderfully lithe bodies, 1235
encourage them to move their gams
rapidly to the rhythm of the dance!
For soon there'll be served
limpets and saltfish and sharksteak and dogfish
and mullets and oddfish with savory pickle-sauce 1240
and thrushes with blackbirds and various pigeons
and roosters and pan-roasted wagtails and larks
and nice chunks of hare marinated in mulled wine
and all of it drizzled with honey and silphium
and vinegar, oil and spices galore!¹²⁶ 1245
Now that you've heard what awaits you,
grab your dish double-quick,
get a move on to dinner—

and don't forget some porridge:
you might need it!

1250

BLEPYROS: I'm sure that they're stuffing it in.

CHORUS [*exiting behind Blepyros, the Maid and the girls, all dancing gaily*]:

Lift your legs aloft, hey hey,
We're off to dinner, hoy hoy,
and victory, hurray!
Hurrah hurrah!

1255

3 Assemblywomen

38. Making it clear that the male actor is supposed to be a woman dressed as a man.
39. Men normally carried a walking-stick to the Assembly but not in their everyday business.
40. Praxagora's opening lines parody (an) unknown tragic source(s) and probably contemporary dithyramb as well. Praxagora's name (not revealed until line 115 and probably a comic invention) means roughly "Woman Effective in Public." The lamp—an interior, female "sun" with secret knowledge—symbolically foreshadows the usurpation of the male (exterior) sphere by the female (interior) sphere: see Bowie 1993:255–56, who compares Klytaimestra's manipulation of the beacons in Aischylos' *Agamemnon*, and Parisinou 2000 for women and lamps generally.
41. For depilation and women's grooming see *Lysistrata*, n. 45.

42. A festival for Demeter celebrated only by women: see *Women at the Thesmophoria*, n. 140 and, for the special appropriateness of the Skira for women's plotting, Taafe 1993:184 n. 12. As usual, Aristophanes exploits the stereotype of wives as deceptive, stealthy, thievish and unwholesomely fond of sex and wine, to which access was controlled by their husbands.
43. Evidently Phyromachus (otherwise unknown) had somehow mispronounced *hetairoi* "associates" as *hetairai* "courtesans"; and *hedras* "seats" can also mean "rear ends."
44. For a female variation on this joke see *Lysistrata*, n. 37.
45. The women's names in this scene are for the most part typical, though the first three might have suggested public prominence if they were masculine.
46. Since the identity of this Smikythion is unknown we cannot say why his wife would have no trouble slipping away from him; perhaps he was reputedly negligent or too old to demand the usual morning sex.
47. A comic version of women's names ending in '-strate': Geusi-suggests wine-drinking.
48. For this popular women's goddess see *Lysistrata*, n. 102.
49. The meaning of the jokes about Lamios are obscure. Presumably this Lamios (according to the scholia, a nickname for one Mnesitheos) was likened to the fabled ogre Lamia, who carried a stick and "farted when captured." Argos was the many-eyed giant sent by Hera to stand guard over Zeus' human favorite, Io, whom she had turned into a heifer.
50. For this goddess see *Lysistrata*, n. 100.
51. Spoken not literally (indicating poverty) but in harmless exaggeration, as often in English.
52. For some reason this man's appearance (beard) suggested female genitalia.
53. It was on Agyrrios' recent proposal that assemblymen began to be paid for attendance (see Introduction 1); Aristophanes insinuates that he had attained political prominence by submitting to sexual penetration—a stock comic assumption about politicians.
54. Actually the Assembly was purified with a piglet; the women, normally confined to the house, naturally think of a house pet.
55. Perhaps noticing among the spectators a man known for loquacity in the assembly.
56. Garlands were worn not only by speakers in assembly but also at drinking-parties (symposia), neither of which citizen women could attend.
57. That is, Demeter and Kore, a woman's oath.
58. That is, in the audience. This Epigonos is unknown, although a man with this rare name is listed in a roughly contemporary inscription among the female members of a cult association.
59. The following speech, which imitates the conventions of public oratory (see Ober and Strauss 1990:264–65; Rothwell 1990:82–92), begins by making criticisms of the political status quo that are not essentially jocular and ends with the fantastic, but not illogical, proposition that women should take over the executive functions of men.
60. The criticisms Praxagora makes in this first part of her speech are virtually the same as had been made some fifteen years earlier in the parabasis of Aristophanes' *Frogs*.
61. The goddess of sexual enjoyment, a woman's oath.
62. The alliance of 395 between Athens and Thebes.

63. Because naval service was a source of income for the poor.
64. Hieronymus was a prominent general. In 392/1 Thrasybulos had persuaded the assembly to reject a treaty with Sparta (proposed by Andokides in the extant speech, *On the Peace*) not (Praxagora alleges) for patriotic reasons but because it would have deprived him of the chance to hold a military command.
65. Praxagora emphasizes traditional women's activities, and the fact that men are envisioned as still being soldiers, because (as she will argue in detail later) the women are to take over only governance from the men, all other gender functions remaining as they were.
66. Where the Athenian Assembly was convened.
67. That is, those displaced in the last decade of the Peloponnesian War (413–404).
68. A distinguished orator who also owned a pottery business.
69. Punning on two senses of the verb *hypokrouein* "to attack" and to "assault sexually."
70. That is, when having sex.
71. Only the first 6000 assemblymen in attendance were paid.
72. Typical men's names.
73. "While the audience is laughing at Blepyros bereft of his garments, off-stage the men of Athens are being bereft of their powers in the Assembly. Aristophanes here uses visual means to convey a dramatic point symbolically," MacDowell 1995:311.
74. The name means, roughly, "pennypincher."
75. Ordinary Athenians would not typically own more than one cloak and one pair of boots.
76. Soft shoes that covered the ankles, worn by women (Stone 1981:227–29).
77. Kinesias was a contemporary dithyrambic poet whose music was so "airy" that comic poets imagined him as flying through the air like a bird.
78. The identity of these men is uncertain, but an ancient commentator says that Amynon was not a doctor but a "prostituted politician."
79. The goddess of childbirth.
80. A rope covered with vermilion and used to mark those late for assembly.
81. Shoemakers, being (like women) indoor workers, were stereotypically pale.
82. Parodying Achilles' lament for Patroklos in Aischylos' play *Myrmidons*, with "those three obols" substituted for "the deceased."
83. See *Assemblywomen*, Introduction, n. 16.
84. Identity unknown, but evidently a poor man.
85. Using the hides as blankets.
86. In reality, the poor gathered at the bath-house not to bathe but to warm themselves by the furnace until they were thrown out by the bathkeeper.
87. A grain magnate who presumably gave out no baker's dozens.
88. That is, Praxagora in disguise.
89. Apparently an effeminate-looking young man.

90. For the secret rites of this festival honoring Demeter and Kore, which only women attended and for which they established their own “government,” see *Women at the Thesmophoria*, Introduction 2.
91. Since neither a woman’s oath nor her testimony was recognized as legally valid, witnesses would in any case be pointless.
92. That is, old men; fear of a reversal of men’s conventional sexual dominance underlies the following jokes.
93. Athena, as protectress of Athens.
94. In which case the midwife would expect to get payment (or a gift) of more than three obols.
95. In introducing the debate Aristophanes elides the distinction between theater and assembly, a sign that he is addressing comic advice to the polis.
96. Bleepyros’ alignment of himself with the spectators (“for us”) indicates that Praxagora, like hero(in)es in previous plays, is addressing her recommendations to all the men in Athens.
97. This is not to be a gender-reversal: the men are asked to do nothing on their part, for example, domestic chores.
98. That is, a prostitute; at Athens they were either slaves owned by a pimp, a brothel-keeper or some other kind of master, or they were resident aliens.
99. The terms of the following sexual regulations make it clear that Praxagora wants both the ugly and the lower classes of both sexes to get their rights.
100. Presumably a man who could be called ugly and/or lower class.
101. Essentially the same question that Glaukon asks Sokrates in Plato’s proposal for community of children in *Republic* (461c).
102. This man was for some reason associated with dung-eating.
103. For weaving, the housewife’s characteristic work, see *Lysistrata*, n. 122.
104. Aristophanes assumes, probably correctly, that most ordinary men would enthusiastically accept such a fantastic inversion of real-life experience.
105. The category “slave-girls” here excludes prostitutes, who have been discussed already.
106. Men found abundant pubic hair unappealing in a woman; see *Lysistrata*, nn. 45, 168.
107. Her plan accomplished, Praxagora has no further need to appear onstage, and we shall not see her again. But she is not forgotten, since we are periodically reminded that she is at work in the city center and that her plan is being triumphantly realized: see Introduction 3.
108. For an analysis of this scene, a representative debate between a cooperative, law-abiding citizen and a self-interested scoff-law, see Rothwell 1990:60–66.
109. See *Lysistrata*, n. 143. This parade of utensils—a new kind of “civic festival”—aptly symbolizes the new replacement of the polis by the household; recall the women’s conversion (described in the previous scene) of the polis’s governmental apparatus into dining-halls and kitchens.
110. Since the Greeks had no alarm clocks, the Neighbor is probably addressing his rooster!
111. Not the tragic poet, who had died some 15 years earlier, but the son of Adeimantos of Myrrhinous and protégé of the general Konon; after the failure of his tax plan, his name came to denote a score of forty in games of dice.

112. For analyses of this episode, which illustrates, like the Kinesias-Myrrhine scene in *Lysistrata*, the sexual consequences of the heroine's plot, see Said 1979, Henderson 1987:118–19, Rothwell 1990:66–72, MacDowell 1995:317–20.
113. A dildo: see *Lysistrata*, n. 48.
114. Classical Greeks associated fellatio (stereotypically a specialty of older prostitutes) with Lesbos, as some do today with France.
115. The reciprocal erotic passion between Epigenes and the girl is the first such “romantic” relationship portrayed in surviving Greek drama.
116. A musician and composer of erotic songs, Charixene (the name means “nice to strangers”) had apparently attracted (or persisted in trying to attract) lovers after she had begun to grow old.
117. A legendary robber who fitted his victims to a bed by stretching those who were too short and trimming those who were too long; there is also a pun on the verb *prokroucin*, “to bang” (sexually).
118. According to Attic law, no woman could transact any business for more than the value of one *medimnos* of barley (the equivalent of an average family's weekly groceries) without the permission of her male head of household; for this and other financial regulations concerning women see Foxhall 1989.
119. The origin of this proverb, indicating ultimate compulsion, is unclear.
120. The following routine, in which Epigenes equates going to bed with the old woman with his own funeral, comically reverses the familiar poetic connection (for which see Barringer 1991) between a woman's marriage and her death.
121. Waxen garlands were used in funerals.
122. Not a very cogent argument: since Praxagora, unlike Plato (*Republic* 5), has not planned to separate mothers from their newborn children, mothers and children will still be able to identify one another. But the argument is persuasive enough to deter the First Old Woman.
123. A horrible bogey-woman.
124. This law ordered that those accused of injuring the Athenian people should be bound and face (not fuck!) the charge before the people.
125. The tipsy maid reminds us that in the new regime women have taken control of the household stores, including the wine: in *Women at the Thesmophoria* the women complain of male strictness about allowing access to the stores.
126. In the Greek this list of foods is combined into one huge word, the longest attested word in any Indo-European language.